

VZCZCXRO6446
RR RUEHCI
DE RUEHKA #0629 1060841
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 160841Z APR 07
FM AMEMBASSY DHAKA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3832
INFO RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7879
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1602
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 9040
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9832
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 000629

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/16/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH ANNOUNCES ELECTIONS BY END OF 2008

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia A. Butenis; reason 1.4(d)

¶1. (U) Election timeline: Chief Advisor Fakhruddin Ahmed announced April 12 that elections will be held by the end of ¶2008. The announcement was part of his nationwide address reviewing the Caretaker Government's accomplishments in its first 90 days and reaffirming the CG's commitment "not (to) stay in office a day longer than is necessary." The announcement follows earlier Election Commission statements that it would need 18 months to prepare for elections. In addition to previously announced plans to prepare a photo voter registration list and a national identity card, Fakhruddin highlighted plans to require party registration, internal party reforms, political party financial transparency and candidate financial disclosure. The Election Commission will be empowered to enforce the new election rules.

¶2. (U) Reforms Progress: Fakhruddin also highlighted progress on the Caretaker Government's anti-corruption and economic reform agenda, while preparing his audience for the inevitable power shortfalls this summer. He praised the military's "positive contributions and cooperation," along with improved government services and a range of social accomplishments. He closed by calling on Bangladeshis to rededicate themselves to the welfare of Bangladesh and to establish Bangladesh "as a modern country by upholding democratic values." The full text of the speech is available at:
www.thedailystar.net/2007/04/13/d70413060162.htm

¶3. (U) Reaction Positive: Public reaction to Fakhruddin's pledge was positive with most people welcoming a clear timeframe. Many had expected a longer delay, given the Election Commission's earlier announcement that it would need 18 months to prepare for elections. Few political leaders were willing to comment and those who did so argued elections should be held much sooner. Editorials too praised the government's announcement of a target date for elections, although many called for further clarity on the substance and timing of electoral reforms and benchmarks for the intermediate steps needed to prepare for elections.

¶4. (C) Comment: Fakhruddin's welcome announcement resolves the election timeframe issue and provides one clear benchmark for measuring the government's commitment to a return to a democratically elected government. While there is mounting evidence that the government has a settled plan for achieving this goal, its lack of transparency regarding the process makes progress difficult to gauge. Moreover, political party involvement in this process is conspicuously absent. We will continue to press the government to lift the ban on political party activity, to engage the parties in the election reform process and to meet the actions and deadlines needed to fulfill their commitment to hold elections by the

end of 2008. Nonetheless, the timeframe announcement, along with the Chief of Army Staff's continued disavowal (reported septel) of any plan for a national unity government or a military political party are very encouraging signs that Bangladesh is moving back to elected government.

BUTENIS